

SOCIAL SILHOUETTES.

BEING THE IMPRESSIONS OF MR. MARK MANTAN.

I.

THE LADY WHO HATES TO BE FORGOTTEN.

I used finely to take for granted, when I first cast the most casually observing eye upon social New-York matters, that in the gaudy and dizzy whirl which is summed up by "going everywhere," the person or persons who went everywhere always felt the sun and keen spur of a permanent enjoyment. It did not seem credible that the special development which cynic, optimist, moralist or denunciator have all frankly conceded to mean "society," could exist without a universal desire and aptitude for sincere recreation. Those who drank of the effervescent waters were thirsty, and they drank because they thirsted. I had no suspicion that they drank for any other reason. I was young, and I had not yet learned my fellowship with mortals who were like nulla phisian an almost empty stream and productive of no appreciable crust. The apartments of my hosts were as yet for me halls dedicated to unmixed diversion. I was prepared for inordinate folly and for untold flippancy. I prided myself upon being wise in my generation, and upon having my wisdom as ready and tangible as the modish flower in my buttonhole. I left within me a vast capacity for sneering and depreciating. I had cultivated a certain upward flourish of the hand toward my moustache, and a certain sarcastic elevation of the eyebrows. In my fresh and fervid adolescence I took the Scriptural Solomon at his word. It was all vanity. Of course it was. Miss Van Dam, who had a look like a swan's and little red-gold curls clustering dense and delightful just at the milky nape of it—who gave me a smile by six good degrees brighter than that which she gave to the feline despot of Forts, Dick Allegany—who had "talked the German" with me for three successive balls when at least twenty men would have mortgaged the gloss of their radiant boots to have had her as a partner—yes, even that sweet reigning bit of feminine deity, Miss Van Dam, was all vanity, like all the rest of it. Such was my superb, placid theory then. I knew very well that there were many people in the gay crowd who did not begin to get the nice rest from it that I secured. But I accepted unthinkingly the innocent belief that everybody attained some sort of positive pleasure. I never thought otherwise. I never occurred to me to think otherwise, at first. But ultimately I drifted into the habit of observing. Observation, for a man of brains, is a dangerous mental mood. With the average man of fashion it is quite harmless, and for reasons needless to state.

Those who affirm that I became an ironical and merciless critic of New-York society because Lucy Van Dam rejected me and married that recent importation of English idocy, Lord Slantingthead, are at liberty to circulate their fatuous notions. I care nothing for such baseless gossip. I esteem it, indeed, a proof of weakness that I, Mark Manhattan, should even respond by vague allusion to their weird dispositions. I have become an observer for various reasons. Prominent among these, I think, is a tendency toward preferring a sensible book and a big elastic lounge in my nice suite of rooms at The Bolingbroke to name bubble and snuffed brandy-and-soda at the Metropolitan Club long after repastable hours. I suppose that if I had not become an observer, these impressions, which I now hand to my good friend, Mr. Edgar Fawcett (and which he will publish at his discretion, and with whatever alterations as regards syntax or elimination his trusted taste may find proper), would never have been written.

My first exploit in the way of pure and simple observation is directly traceable to Mrs. Ridgeway Bridgeway. No one had ever before known how the Bridgeways until this lady insisted upon having their importance brilliantly transpare. It was said, after she had successfully stormed the portals of patrician favor that she had effected her determined purpose of "knowing people," because society, languidly gazing at her ubiquitous card, had half made up its mind that she must be a Ridgeway before soundly deciding that she was in reality a Ridgeway. Everybody had of course heard of the Ridgeways; they had been a Ridgeway in New-York as far back as 1839. It was a pretty good distance to recollect, but a few Knickerbocker grandmothers had been able to revive their snobbish intelligences and state that a family of Ridgeways had once taken a house in Bond street had "got away," and had afterward gone abroad. The name had a certain half-spurious familiarity, drowsily indured by fading grandmammies. But Mrs. Bridgeway, who was not at all a Ridgeway, profited by this dubious investigation. There is no doubt that she rapidly secured a distinct prestige. She had a large basement house in Thirty-seventh, and she issued cards to receptions and dinners with a grandly reckless hospitality. She introduced people to her husband, and in a measure Mr. Bridgeway (who was a pale, quiescent man with a probably ample fortune made in some New-England city) became mildly popular. But he never achieved the salutary effect I will not say "popularity" of his wife. He was always a kind of matrimonial shadow. I can see him now, while I write these confessions, looming at six good feet of lank height, with his rosato badness, his timid articulation, his sallow visage, his tremulous eyeglasses, his long, thin, restless hands, and his perpetual roll of two rather glutinous, dead-gray eyes in the direction of his diminutive wife.

Dominating, in a communal sense, Mrs. Bridgeway indeed was. She had evidently long ago put her husband in the background, and he made a most conveniently neutral and unobtrusive one. But she herself was an immense and comprehensive foreground. Not physically speaking, but in the sense of a vivacious, feverish and literally effervescent personality. She always impressed me as a woman on the verge of the emotional boiling-point. She had achieved her purpose, when I met her. She had got into society, she knew pretty nearly everybody. I had the fancy that she was civil to me because I had not got into society, but because I had taken a hereditary position there, and did not only know pretty nearly everybody but knew or had the easy claim to know all people who were of the least note. But Mrs. Bridgeway was a strenuous snob, I never found her out. Others may have made such discovery; I did not. It takes a snob to catch a thief, as it takes a thief to catch a thief. Mrs. Bridgeway and I met and became undoubted friends. She never missed a party, she never missed a kettle-drum, even; there is enormous significance in that simple statement, for the leaves of Vallombrosa are not more multitudinous than at certain seasons are the kettle-drums of New-York. I once retrospectively decided, at the end of a very festal February, that I had taken Mrs. Bridgeway into dinner twelve distinct times since the thirty-first of the preceding January. We were still excellent friends, but I had now fully recognized and accepted our unpalatable fact—Mrs. Bridgeway bore me. I failed wholly, at first, to comprehend why.

She was unquestionably pretty. Her figure was spare, and with a kind of angularity, but was very graceful, and she knew how to move and pose with a distinction that quite escaped glaring aspersiveness. She marred her hair in a sort of fuzz low over her straight eyebrows and neatly-cut nose; she had eyes that were as actively gray as her husband's were tamely so; she possessed a mouth whose smile might have been more ample in its disclosures of white and saucy teeth without losing that charm which hid in the winsome curl of its pink lips, or the nestling dimple at either of its corners. And yet this woman bored me. Not by any means that she was naturally stupid or dull; I had long ago decided that she was dowered with a capable brain. Not by any means that she chose heavy conversational subjects; she always, on the contrary, revealed a perfect willingness to discuss the most ordinary flippances. Not by any means that she carried propriety to the verge of prudishness; for although her line, in this respect, was unmistakably drawn, it lay just at the bounds of a pretty and wholesome female dignity. Why, then, did Mrs. Ridgeway Bridgeway bore me? I reflected; I rationalized; I summarized. And at length the truth burst, vivid and indisputable.

Mrs. Bridgeway was bored herself. There lay the social and lucid reason for my own *causal*. She was living a life of complete insincerity. Her heart

was not in her work. Her fashionable career was conducted on automatic and mechanical principles. She did not go out because she liked to go out. She went out because she had a morbid hatred of being forgotten.

The more I mused upon my discovery the more convinced I became of its vital truth. And narrow watching served only to fix my belief. She enjoyed nothing in the sphere to which she had dedicated her best energies and talents. She found the pleasure of triumph—of having it said and accepted that she was *de la mode*, but she found no other pleasure whatever. There was something almost ghostly in her rigid and fervid adherence to what she detested. She lacked the courage to fling away her hand and quit the game. She went on playing because others played—because it was the approved thing to do. She had been bitten by a craving to have herself conceded an aristocrat. She had lost the power of securing any comfort from obscurity. If the whole system of fashionable society had been swept out of existence, she would have rejoiced. While it continued, she must be in it and of it. She secretly despised and loathed it. She must pretend among the pretenders and sham among the shamers.

I remember very clearly the special evening on which I resolved to tell Mrs. Bridgeway of my convictions. Of course I meant to do with all due courtesy and discretion. It was after a particularly splendid dinner of which we had been common participants. When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the great drawing room I dropped into a soft easy-chair at Mrs. Bridgeway's side. "It was all vanity. Of course it was. Miss Van Dam, who had a look like a swan's and little red-gold curls clustering dense and delightful just at the milky nape of it—who gave me a smile by six good degrees brighter than that which she gave to the feline despot of Forts, Dick Allegany—who had "talked the German" with me for three successive balls when at least twenty men would have mortgaged the gloss of their radiant boots to have had her as a partner—yes, even that sweet reigning bit of feminine deity, Miss Van Dam, was all vanity, like all the rest of it. Such was my superb, placid theory then. I knew very well that there were many people in the gay crowd who did not begin to get the nice rest from it that I secured. But I accepted unthinkingly the innocent belief that everybody attained some sort of positive pleasure. I never thought otherwise. I never occurred to me to think otherwise, at first. But ultimately I drifted into the habit of observing. Observation, for a man of brains, is a dangerous mental mood. With the average man of fashion it is quite harmless, and for reasons needless to state.

A rumor says Carl Schurz shed tears at the house where he apostolized to a great party to become a hero of a set of neophytes. They were as proud of him as of the old way as the bishops and Jesuits at Innsbruck were of the daughter of Gustavus Adolphus standing up in a white shirt and with a candle in her hand to hear her father chanted and to renounce his liberal church. Did the cock crow three times among that band of pupils? Yes, Schurz should have gone out and wangled bitterly. Henceforth he must listen unprestigious to old rudeses on the Bourbon side of life and shiver in his transcendental memory to think how once his soul flamed at the bright name of freedom and fellow-men and a young, unconventional world. He will be better in the Democracy. There he will know some human nature at least. He can learn to play poker, and then go to sleep talking about his Bastiat and Chevalier. His inconstancy to large general causes is his infirmity. His boy who bears the name of Lincoln will make allowances for him as the father has seldom done for his erring contemporaries. The great, unwithering Republican army marches away with drums beating and colors flying as after the burial of some general officer. Green is the turf above our friend, who only lacked common sense and self-service to have been something of a man.

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my uniability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the dinner for widely different reasons."

"What rascous?" she sharply asked.

"Very general ones. Those which make you fail to care for society under any of its conditions."

"Who told you that?" she questioned, with tart briskness of tone.

"My own imagination is my sole informant." I said, summoning all my unability as I leaned further into her. "I am afraid, Mrs. Bridgeway," I went on, with unvoiced earnestness and gravity, "that you failed to enjoy the